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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL
AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT

Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights

SWEDEN

1. At its 13th, 15th and 16th meetings, held on 9 and 10 May 1995, the Committee considered the third periodic report of Sweden concerning the rights covered by articles 1 to 15 of the Covenant (E/1994/104/Add.1), along with the written replies to the list of issues prepared by the pre-sessional working group and adopted* the following concluding observations.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the report and supplementary information submitted by the State party, as well as the written answers to the list of issues, and welcomes the high-level delegation representing the State party during the consideration of the report. The Committee expresses satisfaction at the quality of the dialogue established between it and the State party, which it considers to have been frank and highly constructive in enabling the Committee to gain a clear understanding of the extent of the State party's compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

B. Positive Aspects

3. The Committee notes with satisfaction Sweden's achievements to date in promoting economic stability and providing social benefits for most persons living within its territory. It welcomes the recent establishment of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman and the previously noted Office of the Ombudsman

* At the 27th meeting (twelfth session), held on 18 May 1995.

against Ethnic Discrimination. It further notes with appreciation the high degree of attention being paid to human rights in the areas of education, overseas development assistance, and training of personnel involved in the administration of justice.

4. The Committee acknowledges the social assistance benefits being accorded to refugees, which include provision of temporary housing and other settlement benefits.

5. The Committee also notes the significant degree of autonomy granted to the Sami people, which is evident in the existence of a parliament elected by the Sami, in their education and their cultural and economic activities.

6. The Committee welcomes the Government's training policies to assist the unemployed, particularly among young persons-the group which has been most affected by the economic recession, learn new skills to facilitate their return to the labour force.

C. Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Covenant

7. The Committee takes note of Sweden's reduced financial ability to continue its programmes of social security at the levels enjoyed in the past, due in part to the domestic structural adjustment and the effects of the global economic recession on the internal economic situation in Sweden. The Committee notes that the recession has aggravated the levels of unemployment, especially among men and young persons.

8. The Committee also notes with concern the growing number of immigrants whose economic, social and cultural rights Sweden should endeavour to protect. The Committee further notes that the problems of this group are aggravated by their unfamiliarity with Swedish culture and language, which renders more difficult their ability to find gainful employment. The economic recession has unfortunately contributed to rising social tensions which have been manifested in the rising number of cases of racism, xenophobia and segregation and which have sometimes resulted in violence.

D. Principal subjects of concern

9. The Committee notes that many of the Government's social welfare programmes have been curtailed in response to the changed economic conditions. In this regard, the Committee notes with concern the adverse impact of the economic recession on the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups.

10. The Committee notes with concern the lack of information possessed by the Swedish Government in relation to the problems of child pornography and domestic violence against women. The Committee notes that the Government considers these to be serious problems and is concerned that the lack of statistical information on these problems prevents both the Committee and the Government itself from ascertaining the true extent of the problems and thus hinders efforts to combat them.

11. The Committee notes that the Government of Sweden has not ratified ILO Convention 103 on maternal protection in due course.

E. Suggestions and recommendations

12. The Committee encourages the Government to continue to take adequate measures to ensure that the reduction of the Government's social welfare programmes do not result in a violation of the State party's obligations under the Covenant. In this connection, the Committee recommends that particular attention be paid to fighting unemployment and to ensuring the same degree of welfare to all segments of the Swedish society, as well as to speeding up the social integration of the immigrants.

13. The Committee urges the Government to intensify its efforts to combat child pornography and domestic violence against women, as well as its measures for monitoring and registering all such cases. It draws attention to the need to ensure the imposition of appropriate penalties for such offences.

14. In view of the importance of maternity leave in context of article 10 of the Covenant, the Committee encourages the Government in its stated intention to review its position with regard to ILO Convention 103.

15. The Committee welcomes the delegation's offer to provide additional written responses to the issues raised but not fully addressed during the consideration of the report, particularly regarding the status of the Covenant in domestic law, and in relation to cases where the Covenant was invoked in a court of law, and the results of any such cases. The Committee also looks forward to receiving information regarding the status of immigrants and the Government's efforts to combat discrimination and violence against them.